

looking like a true survivor, feeling like a little kid by palisadespalisades

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Coming Out, F/F, Fluff and Humor, Gen, M/M, Mom!Steve, Unrequited Crush, Will has a Crush, mostly just fluff though, trans lesbian!jo

Language: English

Characters: Jonathan Byers, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-11-27

Updated: 2017-11-27

Packaged: 2022-04-03 05:02:32

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,130

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Steve has done his best to be there for his kids, and trying to be there for Will has been a little more work than it has been for the other kids, but that's alright. The squeakiest wheel gets the grease, right? So that's why he drove all the way to the city to pick up a rainbow decal for his car, and why he plays Queen and Elton John when he's lugging Will around, and why he hints, whenever he can, that there's more than "straight" in Hawkins — himself included — so maybe Will would pick up that he's not alone.

Steve's not good at subtlety, though, and when he spots Will sketching him, stars in his eyes, he thinks maybe he's been giving off the wrong impression.

(Will has an innocent little crush on Steve. Steve is trying to figure out how the hell he's going to deal with it.)

looking like a true survivor, feeling like a little kid

Author's Note:

this is just a quick little coming-out type drabble. i think it's cute. featuring puppy crushes, steve doing his best to be a good pflag mom, jancy being the sweetest lesbian couple and happy endings.

let me know what you think/send me prompts @ homokaspbrak!

Steve has done his best to be there for his kids. He's trying to work with Dustin on his self-confidence, and he's always there to talk girls (and breakups) with Lucas. He tries to make sure Mike knows he's around when he needs to vent, and he's been teaching Max self-defence (though now, she's throwing punches that could take *him* out). Steve tries to be there for all of them, and though he's the toughest nut to crack, he thinks he needs to be there for Will most of all — Will trusts his sister a lot more than he trusts Steve, but, either way, Steve's been trying to hint, subtly, that being gay is okay. Maybe he's making more assumptions than he should, when he thinks that that's what Will needs from him, but he feels like it's working. That it's helping. That *he's* helping. And that's all he wants — because, as begrudged as he tries to act, he really cares about these kids, and that's why he tries so hard to be there for him.

Trying to be there for Will has been a little more work than it has been for the other kids, but that's alright. The squeakiest wheel gets the grease, right? So that's why he drove all the way to the city to pick up a rainbow decal for his car, and why he plays Queen and Elton John when he's lugging Will around, and why he hints, whenever he can, that there's more than "straight" in Hawkins — himself included — so maybe Will would pick up that he's not alone.

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He's sitting on Nancy's bedroom floor, Nancy and Jo on the bed holding hands, when he looks up from his homework and says, "Dude, I think your brother has a crush on me."

Nancy says "Mike?" at the same time Jo says "Don't call me dude," and he blinks, because he forgot that they both had brothers that, in all likelihood, weren't straight.

He shakes his head, pointing at Jo. "I meant her. Sorry." He clears this throat. "I think Will has a crush on me. I've tried to put out these *cool queer big brother* vibes for him, but I don't... think he picked it up. In the right way, anyways."

Jo buries her head on Nancy's shoulder, and Nancy barks out a laugh, then covers her mouth. "Oh, *shit*," she says, when she realizes the implications of what Steve's saying. Now that he's said it out loud, he feels kind of sick when he thinks about it. Nothing's worse than an impossible, unrequited crush — but especially for a little gay kid in a nowhere town. That doesn't just suck, it's *heartbreaking*. And even though he has to, Steve doesn't think Will deserves his heart broken. Not after everything he's been through.

He gives her a glum look through his deflating hair. "*Oh, shit* indeed."

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It doesn't come up again for a month, thankfully, and Steve tries to tone it down — but it's hard. Will loves it when they're driving around and Steve plays Bonnie Tyler and lip-syncs along, adding in drum solos where there aren't actually any drum solos, getting the whole car to bob their manes to the beat. He can't ignore the way Will's ears twitch when he's attempting dating advice with the party and he says "*guys or girls or whoever you're into, it doesn't matter*." He doesn't want to lead the kid, but he knows Will feels like no one's in his corner when it comes to the whole gay thing — he knows Jo would be, but she's not out to anyone but Nancy and Steve, and he doesn't want to force her to out herself when he could understand what Will's going through even better. Steve could stop being so overtly supportive (since it's become clear he's incapable of subtlety), but he doesn't want Will to feel isolated or abandoned — he's dumb, but he's not *stupid*, and he knows what that does to a kid.

(He knows what it did to *him* — he looks at Will and sees wisps of the little bisexual boy he used to be, who had innocent, puppy-love crushes on the boys on basketball team and no idea what to do with them, who felt so alone and afraid that he swallowed up those feelings, and any other feelings he might've had about anything, and turned in a total dick, waiting for a later-later-later to be himself that maybe never would be.)

He wants Will to know that who he happens to be is okay *now*, not later. He knows too many kids like him and Will don't get a later.

And so it goes. Will keeps drawing Steve when he thinks Steve isn't looking, and Steve keeps talking about how funny Stephen Fry is (even though he's 90% sure Will doesn't even know who he *is*, much less that he's gay) and stomping kids down (whether they're in the party or not) when they call something 'gay' with a sharp "There's nothing wrong with being gay. Find a better word, shithead." Nancy keeps laughing at his turmoil, but worrying a little, too, and Jo keeps wringing her hands over the whole situation (but she giggles, too, when Will asks her *how*, exactly, he could try and capture the vastness of Steve's hair with pencil alone). Steve's a little frantic, but he's mostly alright — after all, crushes are harmless, as long as Will doesn't try to do anything about it, and he thinks Will knows better than to try and initiate anything with *Steve* of all people. He hopes he does.

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Incidentally, he doesn't.

Well, it's not that simple: what happens is a) completely accidental, and b) utterly disastrous.

First, Will leaves a sketchbook in Steve's car, when he drops the party off at the arcade one day. He doesn't mean to look through it, but he takes a particularly hard turn and, when he opens the back door, everything just falls out. The sketchbook opens, and it's half-filled with drawings of Steve, and so many hearts that he actually blushes — 1% flattered, 99% mortified. To Will's credit, the drawings are really good. They capture Steve's likeness well, and they're... really, really kind — the way lines crease around his mouth when he smiles,

the exact expression of his scoff, even the fondness in his eyes when he calls the party shitheads (speech bubble included.) It's really sweet, and it makes Steve want to crawl into a hole, because he doesn't want to deal with this — but if it's this serious, he knows he has to.

When he picks the party up, he drops Will off last, telling him that he wants to talk to Jo. Will's sitting shotgun when they pull into the Byers' driveway, and Steve pulls the sketchbook out of the glove compartment and hands it to Will.

"I think you left this in my car, kid." Will blanches when he takes it. He opens it up, as though to make sure it's the one he's thinking of even though he *knows* it is, and slams it shut, all the colour gone from his face. Steve feels so bad for him, he wants to disappear. "You want to talk about it?"

"No, not even a little bit," Will squeaks, and opens the car door. He pauses for a moment, half out of the seat, when he pushes himself back in, and slams it shut. "I guess... I have to, don't I?"

Steve sighs. This whole situation is such *shit*, he's already developing a headache. "I'm not going to make you do anything you don't want to. But you know... it's okay, right?"

"It's... okay?" He looks a little like he's about to cry and, against his better judgement, Steve reaches out and tousles his hair.

"It really is okay, Will," and Will crumples into him, bursting into tears.

"I just — I just — I just. The rainbow decal, and, you keep saying 'boys, too' when you're talking about dating and I *know* it's not just for Max and you're just so *nice* to me and — and — and *Bonnie Tyler*," he says, hiccupping into Steve's shoulder. Steve pats his back and sighs. It's as much of a disaster as he thought it would be.

"I know, kiddo. I know. I'm sorry if I led you on — I know how hard it is to be in your shoes, and I didn't want you to feel alone. I didn't mean for it to end up... like this."

Will looks up at him, still sniffing. “How... do you know, what it’s like? What do you mean?”

Steve grimaced, just a little, and sighed — he knew it was coming, but he’d been dreading it. “I like guys, too. Just. Adult guys. I like adult girls, too, but mostly guys, actually. Just... adults, though. The issue isn’t that you like a boy, Will. It’s that you’re thirteen — it’s like if Dustin had a crush on Nancy. She’d have to break his heart, too, because she’s an adult, and he’s just a kid. I know it feels different, but I promise you, it’s really not.”

He wiped a tear away, just barely cracking a smile. “He totally does — you know that, right?”

“I know,” Steve gave him a toothy smile back, ruffling his hair again. “Are you gonna be okay?”

Will nodded, and opened the door, still clutching his sketchbook to his chest. “I’ll be fine.” He got out of the car, and started walking back to his house.

Steve pulled out of the driveway. Elton John started playing — he’d forgotten that the song was even playing on the way over. *I’m Still Standing* indeed. In that moment, Steve decided Will Byers was a hell of a lot tougher than anyone ever bothered to give him credit for.

After all that shit, the kid was still standing.

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When Will is eighteen, he visits Jo in New York — really, he visits Jo, Nancy *and* Steve (and Steve’s boyfriend), since they all share an apartment. He arrives with his boyfriend, a boy with curly, brown hair that stands a little shorter than him (and looks a *little* like Mike, but not enough for it to worry Steve). He stays for a weekend, just touring around — he has half a mind to try and cram into the apartment, but he has a big scholarship to RISD, and that’s a *dream and a half* that Joyce is working her ass off to help him achieve. They sleep on the pull-out couch (and Nancy and Jo cackle over that — why, Steve doesn’t exactly know, but he tries not to get offended when Nancy whispers to her girlfriend “we *like* Steve, but we don’t

love Steve,” since she very much *does* love him, now that they’ve broken up).

They’re all sitting with their respective partners in the living room, Steve in the armchair with his boo in his lap, Nancy leaning on Jo on the floor, half-draped over her, and Will with his boyfriend on the pull-out, cross-legged and shyly holding hands (which Nancy won’t stop teasing him about, in a soft, sweet kind of way that only she manages — the meanest roasts with the sweetest smile). Steve’s just a little drunk, a couple beers in, buzzed in a pleasant kind of way, and brings up Will’s old crush on him, from all those years back. Will flushes a bright red and his boyfriend giggles. Nancy’s snickering into Jo’s shoulder, and she’s smiling back into Nancy’s hair. Will doesn’t take it lying down, though; he regales all the things Steve thought would make a little gay boy in a homophobic town feel better — “*He played Bonnie Tyler for me, added in these stupid drum solos that weren’t even there, and thought it would end homophobia!*” — and reminded Steve that Dustin was still driving his old junker around with that rainbow decal. He’s sipping a beer that Jo made him *promise* not to tell their mom about, and giggling, and he looks so fucking happy, that Steve isn’t even embarrassed about all the things he did, reminding them it *did* make Will fall for him, after all, so it must’ve helped.

This is what it was all for — Steve did his best to look out for his kids, and, looking at Will now, he feels kind of like a proud momma bird or something. Even if there were some bumps along the road, Will’s happy, and he’s *here*, and that’s what matters. He did a *damn good* job looking out for these kids, and none of them would say otherwise.